

[1]

I know him so well.

He goes to bed at ten, every night. He says goodbye to his friends on the Internet and shuts his laptop down, like clockwork, and then he changes out of his clothes and goes to bed. He dreams, but never remembers what about. When he wakes up in the morning, he's always slept in, and he hurries to get to school in time. He gets home at thirty six minutes past three and does his homework, and then he returns to his laptop until bed. He likes gummy bears, horror films and music that has screamed vocals. He doesn't really have any friends apart from me, so he keeps some weed in his sock drawer for when the loneliness gets too much. He doesn't know what he wants to do after school, but he knows he wants to go and live in a big city. London, maybe. He's so sad because he doesn't realise how beautiful he is. I don't know what I'd be if I didn't love him like I do. I was nothing before him.

We've lived together for twelve months now, it's nice. I used to be one of those faceless people he speaks to online, until we both realised that we couldn't live with being so far away from each other. I moved to the other end of the country to be with him, I made so many sacrifices and I don't regret it at all. His parents are nice, but we just spent most of the time up in his room alone. We don't talk like we used to before I moved in, though. Most of the time I just watch him. It's how I know so much about him.

Tonight, his routine's changed. He doesn't touch the laptop, he just lies on his bed with his face in the pillow and cries. I was concerned, until I looked at his calendar and realised the date. Of course he's upset; it's been a year since I hanged myself.

[2]

I don't know why I looked up, but when I did I saw him there. He stood against my window. His forehead rested against the glass, and his eyes were still and light and he smiled a lipstick-red, cartoonish grin. And he just stood there in the window. My wife was upstairs sleeping, my son was in his crib and I couldn't move I froze and watched him looking past me through the glass.

Oh, please no. His smile never moved but he put a hand up and slid it down the glass, watching me. With matted hair and yellow skin and face through the window.

I couldn't do anything. I just stayed there, frozen, feet still in the bushes I was pruning, looking into my home. He stood against my window.

[3]

Have you ever walked into a room and found a vampire?

No, not the sexy kind, but a foul creature with bony limbs and ashen skin? The kind that snarls as you enter, like a beast about to pounce? The kind that roots you to the spot with its sunken, hypnotic eyes, rendering you unable to flee as you watch the hideous thing uncoil from the shadows? Has your heart started racing though your legs refuse to? Have you felt time slow as the creature crosses the room in the darkness of a blink?

Have you shuddered with fear when it places one clawed hand atop your head and another under your chin so it can tilt you, exposing your neck? Have you squirmed as its rough, dry tongue slides down your cheek, over your jaw, to your throat, in a slithering search that's seeking your artery? Have you felt its hot breath release in a hiss against your skin when it probes your

pulse—the flow that leads to your brain? Has its tongue rested there, throbbing slightly as if savoring the moment? Have you then experienced a sinking, sucking blackness as you discover that not all vampires feed on blood—some feed on memories?

Well, have you?

Maybe not. But let me rephrase the question:

Have you ever walked into a room and suddenly forgotten why you came in?

[4]

To celebrate their first year in university, six friends went camping in the wilderness. After driving for several hours from the nearest town, they discovered a lagoon, nestled beside a cliff ideal for diving. They set up camp in the woods nearby and spent the evening swimming in the warm, clear water. As the sun sunk below the trees, one of the friends went up to the highest point on the cliff and jumped off, while the other 5 watched. Their laughter slowly subsided as they waited for him to surface. It only took half a minute for them to dive in after their friend. Struggling and sputtering among the reeds in the lagoon, they searched hopelessly for him. Finally they disentangled themselves and came up, but they never saw their friend again.

Heartbroken, they returned to the city and passed a strange and lonely year in which their only solace was the knowledge that they would return to the lagoon to honour the anniversary of their friend's death.

A year passed and they returned to the lagoon as a memorial, but as they approached they saw their friend standing there, head bowed. Excitedly they called to him and began running towards him, but he didn't turn. As they got closer they called him more

desparately, but still to no avail. With joy they ran towards him, but stopped dead when they saw not one, but five crosses on the waterside.

[5]

Mommy always leaves me and daddy home on Saturday nights, and me and daddy always go get ice cream in the car after dinner. I have to sit in the back seat until I'm a big boy. I go in the kitchen to see what daddy is cooking for dinner after my Barney movie is over, but he's not in there this time. I saw a note on the counter that said mommy and uncle James were going somewhere together. I'm not sure, I don't read that good. I go find daddy in the garage. I shut the door behind me like I'm supposed to. Daddy is in the car and he already has the car turned on. We must not be eating dinner tonight, only ice cream. I get in the backseat behind daddy since I'm not a big boy yet. Daddy doesn't say anything when I said hello to him. Maybe he can't hear me over the loud car. I think I'll take a nap on the way to ice cream. I feel kinda sleepy.

[6]

There's nothing like the laughter of a baby. Unless it's 1 A.M and you're home alone.

[7]

Every night, when she goes to bed, my little girl can feel
The monsters that surround her, I daren't tell her that they're real

I've broken skeletons in her closet, the man under her bed has died,
I stabbed the thing that's at her window and wiped the cleaver on my thigh.

And now at bedtime, my girl can rest without monsters stepping in
And all it takes for her to sleep is for me to wear her father's skin.

[8]

My daughter woke me around 11:50 last night. My wife and I had picked her up from her friend Sally's birthday party, brought her home, and put her to bed. My wife went into the bedroom to read while I fell asleep watching the Braves game.

"Daddy," she whispered, tugging my shirt sleeve. "Guess how old I'm going to be next month."

"I don't know, beauty," I said as I slipped on my glasses. "How old?"

She smiled and held up four fingers.

It is 7:30 now. My wife and I have been up with her for almost 8 hours. She still refuses to tell us where she got them.

[9]

I take a few calming breaths and try to smooth down my hair with my fingertips. My entire reputation is riding on this one picture; the one that will be immortalized forever. I stayed up the night before, mulling over the final details. Would a classic smile or serious, thoughtful look best represent me? Maybe I should go for

something completely off-the-wall and memorable?

Before I can make up my mind, the bulb goes off in a blinding flash. I blink the stars away and feel disappointment catch in my chest. I'm sure that didn't turn out how I imagined it at all.

"Excuse me," I say politely to the photographer. "Can I re-take that one?"

The police officer doesn't say anything. He can't even look me in the eye.

[10]

He is not a murderer, the man before me. He did not stab a family of four to death in their own home. He did not calmly sit and watch them bleed out on the floor before he left. And yet, I can't help but shiver when I look at him.

He is not a murderer, and I know it. The evidence was weak. He was condemned by powerful men pulling strings. But seeing him now fills me with dread of what is to come.

He is not a murderer, but I am about to become one. My hand trembles as it approaches the lever.

[11]

Most people who talk about "near death experiences" are full of shit. They're usually religious phonies who use their car accidents and surgeries as an opportunity to shill for their preferred myths and superstitions. They talk about bright lights, a sense of calm, blah, blah, blah. None of it's true. Last year I had a major heart

attack. I spent 10 minutes legally dead before the doctors were able to restore my heartbeat. 10 minutes I spent; staring directly into the eyes of God.

You may ask me, quite reasonably, that if I know God exists then why don't I go to church? Why don't I pray? And, if you're feeling particularly macabre, why do I continue to take my heart medication to prolong my life when I know I'll meet God when I die?

I can answer all of these questions at once. If you saw the God that I saw, you would do anything not to see it again.

[12]

The neighbor was a weird man, he was reclusive and never really spoke to anyone. Tom liked to scare me by saying he must be a murderer, that he always kept to himself so people wouldn't catch on. I didn't like the jokes and would tell him off, the neighbor was probably just shy. Although I got mad at the jokes I had to admit, the neighbor did make me uncomfortable. Tom worked a mix of day and night shifts, tonight happened to be one of his night shifts, I don't like the idea of being home alone at night, everything seems more sinister but I tend to shake these feelings by watching some TV and going to bed.

I was jolted awake by a loud noise, maybe Tom had come home? I looked at my clock and saw it was 2:30 in the morning. Panic rose, my mind was racing and I didn't know what to think, there was only two facts that kept repeating in my mind; Tom didn't finish work till 6 and that noise came from inside the house. I quickly looked out the second storey bedroom window to the drive way below in case he did come back early, his car wasn't there but what I saw made my blood run cold, it was my neighbor breaking into my house. I grabbed my phone and called the police. I waited in my room, too scared to go downstairs and prayed the police

would come in time. They did, they caught him.

I was still in my bedroom, watching from my window as they took him to the car, he was struggling and screaming, he really was a mad man. "You don't understand!" He yelled " I saw someone else go in the house!" as my brain was processing his meaning I heard my bedroom door shut behind me.

[13]

He hits her again, harder this time. Her head rocks back; her eyes roll wildly. A wet gagging sound slides out of her leaking red mouth. She spits two molars onto the carpet.

"You BITCH!"

He is sobbing now, his shoulders heaving raggedly between punches. The living room walls echo the dull meat market sounds of fist against flesh. She looks him dead in the eye and spits out an incisor, another molar, a canine. Teeth lay scattered between them like dead constellations.

"Where is he? Oh God, where is my son?" This time the blow knocks her sprawling to the floor. She spits out two more incisors and a half-digested index finger.

And then this thing that looks like his wife just stares up at him and smiles with a mouthful of impossibly sharp teeth.

[14]

He was dead, that much was clear. She looked from the still body lying on the road to the dented hood of her BMW in a panic. She'd

gotten out of trouble before, but nothing on this scale. This didn't seem like something she could just make go away. She contemplated the broken form in front of her.

He seemed homeless: ancient tattered clothing, grizzled features, hell, even for a corpse he looked sickly. There was a drainage ditch by the side of the road...well, odds were good no one would miss him.

It didn't take much force to nudge his emaciated form in. Her ill-gotten relief was cut short, however, as a hand closed around her throat. A harsh voice whispered in her ear; "Just so you know, I only eat the ones who try to leave; woulda let you go if you tried to help. " He snapped her neck, almost gently, to look her in the eye.

"We're both monsters, sweetheart. I'm just more honest about it. "

[15]

I kissed Lucy on the neck and she looked at me with her warm, brown eyes, a grin on her face. I've seen that look several times before, and good things always followed it. I slipped a hand underneath her scrubs - she was a medical student - and I was considering stopping the elevator as it descended. It was late and there usually wasn't anyone in this part of the university.

We barely noticed when the elevator slowed down and opened, and a nervous looking man entered. He was wearing a large lab coat. It looked a bit stained and dirty, but then again it's a lab coat. I heard Lucy gasp as we broke apart from our embrace, and I quickly removed my hand from where it was. The man stood across from us, but he wasn't looking at us. He seemed to be staring into nothing, seemingly deep in thought, rocking back and forth on his feet. He looked like a stereotypical absent-minded professor.

I fought the urge to smile, as I conclude to myself that this man was probably Lucy's prof. She was easily embarrassed. Finally the door opened, and Lucy pulled me the fuck out of that elevator, out into the lobby. I started to laugh.

"Who was that? Your professor?" I asked her as we walked. I glanced over my shoulder and the guy was right behind us, walking quickly. I looked back at Lucy and grinned. She stared back with her big brown eyes, but I felt alarmed as I saw the panic in them.

"No," she said, gripping my arm tight, pulling me faster. "We were studying that corpse hours ago."

[16]

My cat is silent. I never know he's coming until his feet land on the foot of my bed and I feel him stepping carefully over my legs as he makes his way toward my head. I never open my eyes. I know that my cat will soon curl up next to my head and settle down to sleep.

My cat is silent, but the thing moving toward my head just giggled.

[17]

She's there again. Hovering scant inches from outside my window. Making faces, looking in. I can't stand it and she isn't the first. Mother and father passed away long ago, long before I can remember. All I have to keep me company is my inner voice, if I can quell its anger. Some days it's easier than others, some days no one appears at the window at all. When they do, though, there's no one to tell. No one to cry to about the scary things mocking me through my window.

She's doing it again. She's lighting a candle. She's looking in again. She's saying my name. She won't shut up. Maybe I'll make her. Say it one more time. Say Bloody Mary.

[18]

I'm on a boat in the middle of a lake.
They're not fast.
I was able to outrun them without a problem.
It's not just my family, it appears to have happened to the whole town.
They're standing all around the lake.
They're staring at me.
I called the police.
They should have arrived hours ago.
I still hope someone will come.
They seem to be unable to swim.
The lake is not deep.
You could wade to my boat without getting your shoulders wet.
I hope they don't realize that.

[19]

"What's up with that guy?" I asked under my breath, watching the twitchy little man slink down the hallway. He disappeared behind his door to the sound of a dozen locks turning. "That guy," said the janitor as he got on the elevator with me, "is Hollis J. Finkleton, the richest man in the world."

This made me laugh. "Really? What's he doing living in my building?"

"Oh, I know all the gossip," the janitor winked.

"Get this – the story goes that Mr. Finkleton once beat the Devil at his own game. No, I swear! He pulled a fast one before ol' Nick could pull any dirty tricks on him. So he won their bet, and bickety-bam, he's richer than rich."

"Right. So where's his mansion? And the limos?"

The janitor snorted. "Y'ever considered what it'd be like to hand the Devil his own hat?"

"I'd feel pretty damn good, I think."

"Sure! At first. Then it might make you a bit worried. A bit paranoid. Somewhat non compos mentis, if you catch my *Italic*. You might not trust a single soul from then on. After all... it's not the kind of thing I can just let slide."

The doors opened again, and I hurried off the suddenly empty elevator.

[20]

He got the call around an hour after work. He was going to let it go to voicemail but decided to answer when he saw who the caller was. "Hello?" he asked with a stutter that he had suppressed decades ago. The officer on the end of the line asked if he would be willing to come down to the station and retrieve someone who had listed him as their emergency contact. The man was a recluse and had little interest in being anyone's emergency contact, so he couldn't imagine anyone feeling the need to make him theirs. Nevertheless, he got in his car and was off to the station.

As he became increasingly lost in thought on the way, his knees

weakened and his palms perspired. He couldn't decide if this was because of anticipation with a slight inflection of excitement or anticipation with a hefty inflection of dreadful anxiety about what he would find at the police station. Regardless, he drove on. When he arrived he walked towards the building. What started as a rather lethargic gait, became a jog and finally a sprint. The man had no idea what was compelling him to accelerate but he did, all the same. He pulled open the heavy door to the station and gave his name to the clerk. After a brief but tedious waiting period they brought her out.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed at a volume one can only reach in a state of pure euphoria. It had been four years since anyone called him that. Four years since the police declared her missing and called off the manhunt. Instead of being overcome by a feeling of relief and utter joy that most can't even imagine, he felt a pang of terror in his very core. It had been four years since he had murdered her in a drunken rage and buried her two states over.

[21]

The snow finally stopped, leaving a blanket of white around my house. No work, no school, no roads. That's why I had to let the man stay a while, I mean, who would send a poor stranger back out into the cold after he'd come to the door for help? He was shivering, wet from the recent snowfall. Curious, however, that I didn't notice any footprints leading up to the house as I let the man in. Must be a trick of the light.

The man is so...strange. I feel him watching me, but when I glance back at him, he's just staring straight ahead. He doesn't talk. I don't think I've even seen him eat. He just sits there, shivering, his hair and clothing dripping. The missing footprints are bothering me, so I check by the front door again. No snow's fallen since he's arrived, but I still don't see any footprints.

Wait, I was wrong. There are footprints. Just not coming from the road. I check around the side of the house, and sure enough, there they are. My eyes follow them from my porch, across the backyard, just past the trees, and then they stop... At the old well that's been boarded up since I moved in. Squinting my eyes, I see that the well has been opened.

Behind me, I hear a steady drip, drip, drip...

[22]

“What the heck? Is that Doc? Why’s he crying like that?”

“Keep your voice down. He lost a patient. He’s always like this when he loses one, which is really rare.”

“Well, he’s the best isn't he? Even the best can’t save them all.”

The two continued their conversation away from the corridor leaving the doctor behind to wallow alone. What the two didn't know is that they didn't need to lower their voices; the doctor couldn't hear a word they said. What he could hear were the same words that pierced through his mind all through med school, all through internship, through residency and every single time, despite giving everything he could. The exact same words bled through his brain when he lost a patient.

My price for what you ask is that each soul you lose becomes mine.

[23]

Brody was crying again; loud and clear over the baby monitor. I

groggily checked the clock. It was 3am. They say having kids is worth it, but so far it's been grueling. I slowly sat up, rubbing my eyes. To my relief, I heard Brody's door open, followed by the sound of soft slippers padding their way into his room. It was my turn to take care of Brody, but Nichole must have beat me to it. I couldn't have asked for a better wife and mother. While still rubbing my eyes, I heard a soft, odd-sounding humming through the baby monitor. Brody almost immediately stopped crying. Thank goodness...I only had 3 hours left to sleep.

I laid back down, turning over to get more comfortable. My eyes fell upon Nichole's silhouette. She was sitting straight-backed, looking down at me. Though I couldn't see her face, I'm sure it was as panicked as mine. I jumped out of bed with a start. I sped out of the room and into the hallway, followed closely behind by what sounded like Nichole raspily trying to keep up while tangled in sheets.

Half naked, I rushed through Brody's doorway and flipped on the lights. Brody was being cradled softly by Nichole; anger and confusion plain on her face.

Nichole's eyes drifted past me, and her face contorted with terror. The crying started again as I slowly turned around.

[24]

Fingers trembling with excitement I opened the package. Just as I had hoped, it was the camera I won on ebay. With mild delight I realized I had received a better deal than I had planned because the previous owner had left the memory card in the slot.

Before sending an e-mail to the seller alerting them of the mistake I decided to see if anything was on it. Setting the camera on slideshow I watched as the camera displayed a picture of a shipping label. My confusion turned to horror as the next image was of a person brutally murdered. The rest of the card was

alternating pictures of a mailing address followed by a murder scene.

The last image was of the shipping label from the box I had just opened.

[25]

I woke up to hear knocking on glass. At first, I thought it was the window - until I heard it again from the mirror.

[26]

The last thing I saw was my alarm clock flashing 12:07 before she pushed her long rotting nails through my chest, her other hand muffling my screams.

I sat bolt upright, relived it was only a dream. As I that my alarm clock read 12:06. I heard my closet door creak open.

[27]

Growing up with cats and dogs, I got used to the sounds of scratching at my door while I slept. Now that I live alone, it is much more unsettling.

[28]

In all of the time that I've lived alone in this house, I swear to God I've closed more doors than I've opened.

[29]

A girl heard her mom yell her name from downstairs, so she got up and started to head down. As she got to the stairs, her mom pulled her into her room and said, "Stop, I heard it too."

[30]

She asked why I was breathing so heavily. I wasn't.

[31]

My wife woke me up last night to tell me there was an intruder in our house. She was murdered by an intruder two years ago.

[32]

I awoke to the sound of the baby monitor crackling with a voice comforting my firstborn child. As I adjusted to a new position, my arm brushed against my wife, sleeping next to me.

[33]

I always thought my cat had a staring problem. She always seemed fixated on my face. Until one day, when I realized that she was always looking just behind me.

[34]

[35]